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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 7685
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001073

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/04/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV NI

SUBJECT: FUNSHO WILLIAMS' DEATH LEADS TO ANGER AND DISARRAY
IN LAGOS STATE PDP

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Funsho Williams, a leading Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial aspirant for Lagos State, was murdered in his home on July 27. Lending this sad event a touch of bitter irony, Williams was killed just several hours after the Lagos Police Commissioner held a meeting with PDP gubernatorial candidates, including Williams, to address mounting electoral violence. In preparation for the 2007 elections, Williams had embarked on grassroots mobilization by touring several local council areas, campaigning, and seeking the support of several political caucuses within the State PDP. His death has exacerbated tension and mistrust within the State PDP. His brutal exit will make it difficult for the PDP to unite and casts a shadow of suspicion over the other PDP aspirants. END SUMMARY.

MOUNTING ELECTION VIOLENCE CULMINATES IN WILLIAMS' MURDER

¶2. (U) The struggle for the PDP Lagos State gubernatorial nomination assumed uncomfortable proportions when supporters of the leading aspirants began to violently attack each other at recent campaign rallies. To salve the inflammation, Lagos Police Commissioner Emmanuel Adebayo held a meeting with gubernatorial aspirants on July 26, the eve of Williams, death. Commissioner Adebayo advised them to keep the peace and restrain their followers. Chief Williams reportedly pleaded for peace in the campaign during the meeting. However, the meeting was singularly ineffective. Adebayo's advice went unheeded as campaign mischief degenerated into a mortal attack.

¶3. (U) Within hours after the meeting, Chief Williams was attacked in his house, repeatedly stabbed and strangled. The British Metropolitan police is assisting in the investigation. Former Minister of Works Chief Adeseye Ogunlewe, a rival PDP gubernatorial aspirant, has been detained by the Nigerian Police in connection with the murder.

Williams' Murder Widely Grieved and Protested

¶4. (SBU) Even in the rough and tumble of Nigerian politics, Chief Williams' murder has evoked protests across the political spectrum. The press is broadcasting messages of outrage from prominent political figures and ordinary citizens alike, coupled with calls for swift and certain justice. President Obasanjo has condemned the killing. The National Chairman of the PDP, Dr. Ahmadu Ali, reportedly described the death of Williams as "a brutal assault on our national psyche," adding the killers would not escape justice. PDP Board of Trustees Chairman, Chief Tony Anenih, said Williams' death posed a major challenge to all Nigerians, and unless the killers were arrested, there would be little hope for the survival of the nation's democracy. Some PDP leaders and protestors have called for the PDP not to field a candidate for the Lagos gubernatorial campaign, calling this the only way to restore confidence in the party. (COMMENT: The call to abjure the gubernatorial race was the product of a fit of emotion and has already evaporated into the ethers. In parts of Lagos, campaign posters of the late candidate have already been torn down or covered by posters of other aspirants. END COMMENT.)

LOST DREAM OF BECOMING GOVERNOR

¶5. (C) Heretofore, the Alf Landon of Lagos politics, Williams had run twice for the state's top seat. Twice he failed. In Dewey-like fashion, Williams was initially announced the winner of the 2003 election but when the final vote was tallied, incumbent Governor Tinubu had won a second

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term. Until his death, Williams was considered one of the top three PDP gubernatorial candidates for Lagos State. In preparation for the 2007 elections, Williams had embarked on grassroots mobilization by touring several local council areas, campaigning, and seeking the support of several political caucuses within the PDP. Williams has been referred to as an amiable politician and a good organizer.

PDP attempting to move ahead, AD still facing difficulties

¶6. (C) The door to the leadership of the PDP in Lagos State now has been flung wide open by Williams' departure. Contrary to what most people think, according to Ayo Aluko, Special Advisor to PDP National Vice Chairman overseeing the South West, only a few PDP members believe his murder was due to intra-party disputes. Aluko postulated that if the assailants were not PDP then it would be much easier to reconcile the aggrieved party members and continue campaigns. One option being considered by the PDP to reconcile party members is to ask all current aspirants to step down so that the party can look for a consensus candidate with the ability to unite the party and brighten its electoral prospect.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) Notwithstanding Aluko's disclaimer, most people and most PDP members believe the author of Williams' murder is a PDP rival. Some of the more cynical observers think the AD might have conjured his demise to toss the PDP into turmoil and cause any PDP candidate to have to campaign with the specter of Williams' death as an unwanted running mate. The most cynical observers think the killing was engineered by the PDP hierarchy, who were tired of Williams losing the State and wanted to dispose of Williams. However, they also will try to pin his death on the AD, thus eliminating two obstacles in one fell swoop. In any event, none of these

various hypotheses are good evidence of anything except that mistrust and suspicion now abound.

18. (C) Chief Williams' murder in his own bed appears to have given Nigeria's political class a moment of pause. However, his name is just the latest on a list that includes former Attorney General Bola Ige,s whose bedroom murder still remains unsolved several years afterwards. The saddest thing is that Williams, death will likely have no long-term effect except for his family and genuine friends. If the past is any judge, this self-reflective pause will be transient. Politicians will reinforce their security complements, spy on each other with greater alacrity and return to the hustings for what promises to be a combative race for the PDP nomination. END COMMENT.

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